

Egbert.

It was in 1951 that Dupont and Schwarz produced the first ectogenetic child. As early as 1901 Heape had transferred embryo rabbits from one female to another, in 1925 Haldane had grown embryonic rats in serum for ten days, but had failed to carry the process to its conclusion, and it was not till 1940 that Clark succeeded with the pig using Kehlmann's solution as medium. Dupont and Schwarz obtained a fresh ovary from a woman who was the victim of an aeroplane accident and kept it alive in their medium for five years. They obtained several eggs and fertilised them successfully*

One of the fertilised ova went to term and for the first time a child was born without giving pain to any woman. When one describes it as the first occasion, however, one must bear in mind the claims of Jehovah, who is said to have carried out a similar experiment at an earlier period. Instead of an ovary, this biologist used a rib and the results are described by some as fairly satisfactory by others as disastrous in the extreme. Be that as it may, so much mystery surrounds this attempt, so much doubt has been cast on the very existence of the investigator, that we are constrained to give the credit of priority to Dupont and Schwarz.

The success of these patient investigators was at once broadcast to the world. At first it was received quite calmly as an interesting biological fact. It aroused no more interest than would the news that a woman in Madagascar had had a farrow of five or that the President of the United States of Europe was now the father of Siamese Twins. Moreover, the event was not altogether unexpected. From the time news had leaked out that a successful issue was probable, the announcers at the broadcasting stations had derived considerable amusement from making up bulletins. These purported to record the progress made by Egbert, the Ecto, as they had already facetiously named him.

It was of course two days later that the storm burst over Europe. People seemed to realise simultaneously the amazing consequences of the event. At Geneva, a woman representing Prague spoke passionately for hours on what she referred to alternately as 'this monstrous abortion of the Laboratory,' 'this emasculate conception.' It would be very wearying to follow all her arguments, but there are certain things she said which give us a clue to the social conditions existing at the time, and as such, are worthy of note. For example "We women can only obtain what we want through some man; through his desire for offspring and the comforts of home life. Lacking strength, defective too in powers of reasoning, how is Woman to obtain a livelihood if the sentimental bonds that bind her to some man are loosed." Again "Woman will have degenerated into a mere plaything. She will mean no more to man than his pipe, his golf club, his glass of beer." Her remarks caused a tremendous amount of excitement which took several weeks to abate.

From the pulpit came equally scathing denunciations. The Christian Church, now upon its last legs made a final bid for supremacy. Fulmination followed fulmination, the most vehement being that of the Bishop of Arrantiers. He spoke long hours on "this offspring of Science and Sin." He urged his congregation to "pray for the soul of this poor child unwittingly born in Sin." The substance of his sermon was: "Sin sacrilege . . . sanctity of home life . . . Sin . . . hellfire . . . satan . . . Sin . . . Sin." His denunciation was received with the greatest coolness.

Unconscious of the stir he had caused, ignorant of the livid epithets hurled at his innocent head, Egbert passed through his first trying week.

*This paragraph is taken from 'Daedalus or Science and the Future' by J. B. S. Haldane.

The first few hours had proved extremely critical and it was only the timely exhibition of Alveolin which converted him from a sad blue devil to a cheerful pink cherub. He was indeed a fine child weighing eighteen pound and possessing the intelligence of an infant of six months.

Synthetic protein mixtures halved the days of his infancy and the care lavished upon him by the kindly Dupont made pleasant the early years of his childhood. But for the protection of Dupont and the vigilance which this entailed it is doubtful if he would have survived to adult age, for Schwarz was constantly trying to vivisect him. This gentleman was an unpleasant fellow, who had obviously entered the laboratory to sate his sadistic lusts. A simian cruelty was the dominant note in his character and was commonly attributed to the fact that his father had been Voronoffed two years before his birth. It was this trait and its manifestation in a constant desire to do exploratory laparotomies on young Egbert which caused the rupture between the co-workers at about this time.

Henceforth Dupont alone controlled Egbert's destinies. He did everything in his power to make things easy for him. Realising early on that his youth would be troubled and difficult if he had no companions he set to work to make him a brother. After two years hard work a fertilised ovum with a male bias, at last passed the critical fifth week and the little brother was well within the realms of probability. But it was not to be. The poor little chap had reached his fourteenth week and was already beginning to kick lustily when he was eaten by the laboratory cat. This was a bitter blow to Dupont, for owing to the failure in the radium supply which occurred at this time, he was unable to repeat his initial success for another thirteen years.

At the age of five Egbert was sent to school. He proved to be a bright lad precocious to a degree, with charming manners and a pleasing exterior. At first things went on smoothly but very soon he was in trouble. His companions had learned that there was something strange about his origin and at once concluded that he was illegitimate. With the cruelty inherent in boys they taunted him with the fact, jeered at him and made his life a misery.

To those unversed in the customs of the period, this may appear rather strange and inexplicable. But if one bears in mind the extraordinary views then current about the propagation of the species, the riddle is solved. There was in those far-off days an institution known as Wedlock. A male and female of the species were locked in a house which subsequently became known as the Home. There they propagated, crudely and unscientifically, like animals. The offspring of such unions received the Blessings of the Church and the patronage of the State. But woe betide the child born out of this Lock system. To him a stigma was said to be attached. He was looked down upon by his fellows and altogether had a poor time of it.

It is now easy to understand why Egbert became an outcast. He soon found to his sorrow that the stigma attached to being born out of Wedlock was nothing to that of being born in a retort. This occasioned him considerable uneasiness and he spent a great deal of time in trying to trace the ovum and spermatozoon, to which he owed his being. His perplexities at this time inspired a poet thus:

"Who was his father?
Who was his mother?
Had he a sister?
Had he a brother?
Or was there a dearer one
Still, and a nearer one
Yet than all other."

When all his efforts had failed he appealed to Dupont, who told him that his mother, a young girl had been killed in an aeroplane accident, two years before his birth. Of his father he would say nothing.

But this was only a passing phase. As he grew older, he became more beautiful and more learned and soon ceased to worry about his peculiar position. Nevertheless he was destined to pass through several serious psychological crises before he attained contentment. Thanks to his origin he steered clear of the Oedipus complex only to fall foul of the Umbilicus complex. The former, a great stumbling block to the youth of the twentieth century was the direct result of the institution known as the Family, while the latter was the bugbear of the early Ectogenes of the twenty-second, who developed inferiority feelings, because they lacked a dimple on the belly wall. With the aid of a learned Freudian, however, he soon achieved catharsis but succumbed subsequently to the narcissistic and homosexual complexes ever waiting to spring on the unwary. From these he was rescued by his foster-father who urged him to cultivate the female of the human species.

He agreed and turned his attention to the daughters of men. Like others before him, he found that they were fair and soon grew to love them exceedingly.

But all his efforts to find a "dearer one still and a nearer one yet" were doomed to failure. His peculiar ante-natal life and the many strange stories of his mysterious birth raised an insuperable barrier between them. He inspired them with fear and disgust. They looked upon him at times as they would upon the representative of some loathsome new species. How the unfortunate man bewailed his lot! How he cursed the fate that had made him an Ectogene!

He retained sufficient of his reasoning faculty, however, to realise that his efforts in this direction would bear no fruit. Deciding that there was little to hope for in the animal kingdom, he turned his attention to the vegetable, and eschewed henceforth the sins of the flesh.

Of his love-life, a poet sings:

"Then a sentimental passion
Of a vegetable fashion
Did excite his languid spleen
An affection *a la plato*
For a bashful young potato:
Then, a not too French, French bean."

Thus he passed from the grosser tubers through the intermediate legumes, until his affections became finally fixed upon the Liliacæ. It was this attachment to flowers which prompted him to apply for and obtain the position of supervisor to the gardens of the League at Geneva. There surrounded by his beloved lilies he passed the last placid years of the life which had begun so tumultuously.

It was in his twenty-sixth year that a routine medical examination showed the sedimentation rate of his blood corpuscles to be abnormally high. A year later he had developed a cough and within two months had died of acute pulmonary tuberculosis.

It is sad to contemplate the life of the first man scientifically produced. One would have thought that ectogenesis with its attendant benefits—the freedom of woman, the destruction of home life—would have been received with rejoicing, that consequently the life of Egbert would have been less lonely and less tragic. But innovations in the interests of the race have always been bitterly opposed and that for this reason Egbert was bound to suffer. Let us console ourselves with the thought that his lot was not altogether unenviable. Let us remember that there will for ever bloom about his name the glory of being the first Ectogene—the pioneer of a new race.

P. M.